



# PSC NEWS

## Missouri Public Service Commission

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FY-02-181

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### PSC STAFF ISSUES ICE STORM REPORT

Jefferson City (June 14, 2002)---Utility companies affected by a devastating ice storm that hit western Missouri on January 30, 2002, were quick to respond and effectively carried out their emergency plans. "Could there be improvements, certainly," according to a report filed today by the Staff of the Missouri Public Service Commission.

"Utility companies affected by this ice storm need to work to enhance their communications with affected customers and city officials," stated Jim Ketter, Senior PSC Staff Engineer. "Contacting city officials and agencies impacted by extended outages twice a year to update telephone and personnel changes; providing feedback to automated telephone system users that information has been received; and ensuring medical-need customers understand procedures and expectations of restoration programs are among our recommendations in this report," said Ketter.

**COMPANY RESPONSE TO ICE STORM**: According to the report, utility companies affected by the western Missouri ice storm quickly activated emergency response and restoration plans in an effort to restore service to nearly 400,000 customers who experienced service disruptions due to downed power lines.

"We conducted a thorough review of how the affected companies responded to what many have called the worst ice storm in Missouri's history, stated Warren Wood, PSC Staff Energy Department Manager. "That review analyzed how fast the companies implemented their restoration plans and how quickly outside crews were called to assist. Our review concludes the companies generally performed well under the circumstances," stated Wood.

Work crews from 16 different states and from as far away as Georgia came to western Missouri in an effort to rapidly restore power to as many customers as possible.

"Utilities affected by the ice storm in Missouri," the PSC Staff report states, "quickly mobilized all of their available crews and sought outside assistance. Out-of-state crews arrived Friday and Saturday

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and provided the extra workforce to repair the electric distribution system. The Restoration Plans provided the organization and structure needed to manage a workforce five to ten times larger than normal.”

**COMMUNICATIONS:** “Electric customers could recognize problems brought by the accumulated ice, but desired more information on where work was focused and when to expect restoration of power,” the PSC Staff report states. “Communication through the utility Call Centers was difficult because of sheer volume. The customers desired feedback and affirmation their outage was recorded and when to expect service.”

The Missouri Public Service Commission responded to over 130 customer inquiries during and after the storm. “Customers trying to call their utility to report outages were frustrated by lack of answers to questions about when power would be restored, downed service lines in their yards, and a lack of understanding of the responsibilities for meter bases and connections at the home,” stated the PSC Staff Report. “Frustrations grew as three, four, and five days without electric service stretched to over a week for some customers, with consequences of lost property, business, and fading confidence that utilities were responding properly.”

**TREE-TRIMMING:** The PSC Staff investigation reviewed company plans and procedures as they relate to tree-trimming. “While tree-trimming expenses have increased since the October 1996 snow storm,” stated Wood, “we believe there is room for improvement in these programs.”

Staff’s investigation shows that tree-trimming cycles were not on schedule, which provided more limbs to collect ice and to interfere with electric lines. According to the report, a review of the tree-trimming cycles and the number of outages reported on those circuits suggests that more customer outages occurred on the circuits with the longer periods since their last trimming. “Intuitively, the closer the limbs, the more likely a weighted limb would cause damage,” the Staff report states. “Circuits with extended growing cycles were more at risk. This observation suggests that efforts should be made to keep on needed trimming schedules for both regular service reliability and storm event damage.”

**WHAT’S NEXT:** “We plan to participate in meetings with city officials and utilities to underscore this important communication link. In addition, tree-trimming policies, call center operations and outage analysis will be monitored by the Staff to evaluate any changes implemented,” stated Wood. Within the next six months, the PSC Staff plans to review each of the report’s recommendations with the utility companies affected by the January 2002 ice storm.